(c) Details are as under:-

Year	Air-India-Per Pilgrim	Saudia-Per Pilgrim
2002	USD 700/- (ex Bangalore, Kozhikode and Delhi)	USD 700/- (ex Ahmedabad, Bombay and Delhi)
	USD 770 (ex Kolkata, Lucknow and Chennai)	
2003	USD 710/- (ex Bangalore, Kozhikode, Nagpur and Delhi)	USD 710 (ex Ahmedabad, Bombay, Hyderabad and Delhi)
	USD 780/- (ex Kolkata, Lucknow and Chennai)	

In addition to the above, fare additional total cash cost incurred by Air India towards royalty, interest and other miscellaneous expenditure was also charged to the Government.

(d) The Haj Committee does not pay any individual carrier, but pays Air India Rs. 12,000/- per pilgrim towards fare of the pilgrims.

Rural branches of Banks

667. SHRI MURLI DEORA: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) the details of rural branches of banks closed and opened by the Public Sector Banks during the last three years;

(b) whether Reserve Bank of India has liberalised the branch licensing norms of if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Banks have started the revamping process to close unviable branches in rural areas;

(d) the branches closed as a result of grant of V.R.S. to staff;

(e) the number of loss-making branches which were closed; and

(f) the amount paid to the staff opting for VRS till date?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI ANANDRAO VITHOBA ADSUL): (a) The details of the rural branches of

banks closed and opened (excluding the Regional Rural Banks) during the last three years are as under:

Sl. No.	Year (1st April to 31st March)	Branches closed/ merged/converted	Branches opened
1.	2000-01	50	20
2.	2001-02	81	14
3.	2002-03	72	22
	TOTAL :	203	56

(b) RBI has reported that its liberalised norms for the branch licensing are as follows:

(i) The Banks are free to identify the locations for opening of new branches taking into account profitablity, availability of infrastructure etc.

(ii) Requests received from banks for opening of branches at locations considered as potentially viable by the banks with the approval of their Board of Directors are considered favourably based on the overall financial rating of the bank.

(iii) Banks are also permitted to open/close/shift Regional/Zonal/ Administrative Offices, as also, open specialized branches such as SSI, Agricultural Finance, etc., without RBI's approval.

(iv) Banks have been allowed to shift (within the locality/ward), as also, close down their unremunerative branches in metropolitan, urban and semi-urban areas where no service-area has been allotted, without approval of RBI.

(v) At rural/semi-urban centers (where service area has been allotted) banks can shift their branches within the services-area and Block without RBI's approval.

(vi) At rural/semi-urban centers (where service area has been allotted), which are served by two commercial bank branches, banks are permitted to close down one of the branches by mutual consultation.

(c) Yes, Sir.

(d) No bank branch has been permitted to be closed down by the RBI due to VRS.

(e) RBI has reported that 130 loss making bank branches (excluding branches of foreign banks and RRBs) were closed/merged/converted during the year 2002-2003.

(f) IBA has reported the amount paid to the staff opting for VRS till date has been to the tune of Rs. 12,400 crores approximately in all, for all the PSBs.

Implementation of VAT

668. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of FINANCE be pleased to state:

(a) when Government are going to convene a meeting of State Chief Ministers to work out details for implementation of VAT in the country;

(b) what are the details of States which have accepted to implement VAT;

(c) the reasons behind non-implementation of VAT by the remaining States; and

(d) what steps Government are taking to convince the States which have not so far agreed to implement VAT?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE (SHRI SHRIPAD YESSO NAIK): (a) There is no proposal to convene a meeting of State Chief Ministers to work out details for implementation of VAT in the country.

(b) to (d) A consensus decision to implement the VAT regime in place of existing sales tax system has been expressed in meetings of the Chief Ministers of States/Union Territories held on 22.6.2000 and 5.7.2001. Subsequently, most of the States and Union Territories expressed their commitment to introduce a VAT regime with effect from 01.04.2003. However, this deadline could not be met. A new road-map for introduction of VAT has to be worked out in consultation with principal political parties and the Empowered Committee of State Finance Ministers.